Dear Harold, 11/30/96

Thanks for the recent letters to Jeff Morley, I received three just yesterday. Locally, the anniversary of the assassination passed without comment. I missed Oprah, but my mother called up the day after and filled me in on some of it. Apparently Marina came across pretty well, telling a story she has been telling for some years now that she doesn't believe her husband did it. But Oprah also included the LaFontaines' story and even put in a call to Oliver Stone, who bragged about his role in opening up the files! Pretty pathetic, but apparently fairly convincing based on my mother's reaction. Jeff Morley sounds a lot like my mother. I pointed out a few facts to contradict what she had heard, but she still seemed reluctant to discount it, and I'm her son.

As you probably know much better than I, this notion about seeking "consensus" on the JFK assassination is very widespread. Opinions do seem to weigh as much (or perhaps even more if packaged in a convincing way) than fact. Even historians seem to embrace this, as you know when you responded to that uninformed roundtable on Stone's movie that appeared in the American Historical Review. I suspect that part of the critical reaction Dennis and I got to our paper is based on this misguided notion. I am thinking of addressing this very issue in a preface or introduction to our book. I believe you put the matter well in one of your letters when you said: "It is childish, no better, for Morley to be hung up on what he refers to repeatedly as "consensus." Fact is not established by opinion -- and the opinion on which he draws is notoriously uninformed and prejudiced. Truth is established by fact. There is no substitute for fact when fact exists." One can go as far back as Plato, as I do in one of my classes, to establish that there is a difference between the realm of fact and knowledge and the realm of opinion, and fact and knowledge are preferable. It seems like such a basic point, but one which is too often ignored or just not understood.

Along that same line, I detest these books that are put out about social issues in which they just gather together a bunch of opposing viewpoints, as if just by being exposed to opinions of the right and the left will help students arrive at some answers. These books usually make no effort to establish any facts about these issues, they just give you a bunch of opinions. I trash brochures for these opposing viewpoints regularly. Certainly one of the points Dennis and I will want to make, especially for those in sociology is that facts do matter, and that the JFK assassination presents an overwhelming factual basis for the failure of institutions. I hate to say it, but many of our colleagues still would not get it!

The semester is winding to a close here and I am hoping that in the next couple weeks I will be able to do some more writing, which I have not done for some weeks now. Dennis sent me a disk that contains the Epilogue and Afterword to Waketh. I've had them printed out. I do need to also take some time to read Waketh from cover to cover.

Hanh-Trang just got back from a two-week stay in California whith her sister who has been undergoing radiation treatments for breast cancer. They took out a small lump and are doing the radiation as a followup. Everything seems ok for now. Hanh-Trang enjoyed the visit. She will be starting a part-time job with a small hospital just accross the border in North Carolina (about 50 min. away). It will only be 8hrs a week, which is fine. She wants to do some painting and writing.

I hope you and Lillian are doing ok. (fine might be too much to ask). Take care.

Best Wishes,

Gerry